



## **ON WALDORF PEDAGOGY - A PEDAGOGY OF THE PRESENT**

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### **Introduction**

Defining the specificity of Waldorf pedagogy has proven to be an essential objective for alternative Waldorf education in Romania, for the practitioners- kindergarten, primary school, middle school and highschool teachers, for the beneficiaries- students and their parents and anyone who may be interested in education and, last but not least, for the authorities involved in the Romanian education system.

The process has not been easy because the international organizations responsible for supporting, promoting, ensuring quality within Waldorf education worldwide have avoided establishing a set of criteria that must be met in order for schools to be entitled to use the Waldorf trademark. The reason for this avoidance of defining the specificity of Waldorf education strictly is that any established set of rules may limit the freedom of Waldorf alternatives in any country in the world.

Only in November 2009, in Dornach, within the International Forum for Steiner/Waldorf Education (Hague Circle) was a document adopted which tried to define the above mentioned specificity, with the overt mention that it is a guideline and a source of inspiration, rather than of limitation. The document is contained in its entirety in the following pages.

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### **Key Characteristics of Waldorf education**

*The International Forum for Steiner Waldorf Education (IF) at its meetings in Vienna/Austria on 17 May 2015 and in Arles/France on 7 May 2016 revised and re-adopted the document “Key characteristics of Waldorf education” – first adopted in Harduf/Israel on 14 November 2014 – as binding guidance for the worldwide Waldorf school movement. These features have been formulated in such a way as to be generally valid and may be supplemented by specific cultural characteristics for use in a school’s own country. They wish to place the emphasis on and strengthen diversity, individuality and openness to development. They supplement the characteristics adopted by the International Forum for Steiner Waldorf Education (Hague Circle) in 2009.*

### **Preliminary remarks**

*In order for schools to be approved as Waldorf or Rudolf Steiner schools, it is necessary to characterise key elements of Waldorf education. Once approval has been granted, this is documented by the inclusion of the school concerned in the worldwide list of Waldorf schools for which the International Forum for Steiner Waldorf Education – (Hague Circle) is responsible. The features described here are formulated in an open-ended way and contain a characterisation of what the International Forum understands by Waldorf education. Such an understanding is involved in a process of development which means that these features will also be supplemented or replaced by others over time; in doing so however, the foundations of this system of education are maintained.*

*This document can serve for one’s personal or institutional guidance (e.g. for self-assessment) and forms a key basis in the approval process for a Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner school.*

*Features of a Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner school include:*

### **The context**

*The Waldorf education movement forms an international network in which the individual Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner schools are autonomous and are networked on a local, regional. Schools in countries which have their own Waldorf Association will be included in the list on the latter’s recommendation. If there is no such association, the IF will make a decision on inclusion on the basis of a qualified recommendation from at least two of its members. Such approval is the prerequisite for the right to use the name “Waldorf” or “Rudolf Steiner”*

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*school; this is regulated in a separate procedure at national and international level – collegially, in friendship and politically.*

*A common awareness and reciprocal exchange in the region, country or internationally strengthen each school's own work. Such an awareness of existing in a wider context can come to expression through partnerships with schools in other countries as much as through assistance for schools which are starting up or in difficulties. The attendance of teachers, parents or pupil representatives at regionally, nationally and internationally organised meetings, further training and conferences is also a part of it.*

*The awareness of one another as well as being in harmony with the key features creates an inner connection; whereas isolation, a niche existence and an unwillingness to collaborate hinder it. It also includes Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner schools seeing and identifying themselves as part of the social context in their surroundings and in public life.*

***The identity of the school***

*Each school is unique. Its identity has its foundation in the way that it exists with all its specific features, benefits and developmental potentials. These are determined by its developmental history, its location and region, the founding parents and teachers who put their mark on the school organism. In addition, its identity is founded in implementing the art of education, Waldorf education, initiated by Rudolf Steiner.*

*The extent to which such an art of education, as it was outlined and described by Rudolf Steiner, can successfully be put into practice and be seen to be reflected in the classroom and the work of the teachers depends on the situation of each school. This relates to the pedagogy, how teachers deal with the pupils, the teaching methodology, how teachers handle the content and transfer of the teaching material equally with the question as to whether the basic strands in the teaching methodology of this art of education are applied; and, finally, whether its methodology is applied in an age-appropriate way as understood by the anthroposophical view of the human being. The important thing is that the individual schools should deal in a creative and responsible way with the areas set out here.*

*The latter form a major part of the school's identity which is completed by what may be perceived as an inner meaning in the individual teacher and the college of teachers. The extent to which the majority of the teachers have worked on an inner attitude of openness and striving for knowledge and self-education with the help of anthroposophy will determine the identity of the school. The pleasure in doing the job, the striving for an understanding of the human being*

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*as the basis for the education and the collaboration with the parents make up the individual atmosphere of each school and are the inner expression of what is generally perceived as the spirit of the school.*

***The framework curriculum***

*The curriculum is not an arbitrary but a constituent element of Waldorf education. It marks essential teaching guidelines whose age-appropriate application strengthens the development of the children and young people through its inherent mirroring and composition across subjects in connected arcs spanning several years. It is continuously being developed taking account of the geographical and cultural location, the political as well as general and global lines of development of the time.*

*Each school is located in a cultural, geographical and political space. This acts on the curriculum in a way comparable with the suggestions made by Rudolf Steiner as to the design of the classrooms and the school architecture in order to create the special atmosphere appropriate for each class. Every region and country has its own access to world history which is the result of its unique history and also affects the curriculum.*

*Every school has to respond to the requirements of the public authorities responsible for education. The extent to which curricular requirements, for example, are included in the curriculum of the Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner schools depends on the political situation in each country. Also the use of Rudolf Steiner's specifications for lessons which relate, for example, more to western cultural values could be supplemented or replaced by cultural content of corresponding value as long as the educational effect is maintained. Foreign language teaching in multi-ethnic countries can be organised accordingly. Both Rudolf Steiner's specifications regarding general methodology and teaching methodology and the qualitative special characteristics of the various languages are definitive.*

*In countries in which several religions coexist, this is reflected by the school in the school customs and festivals. In coordination with the parents, religion lessons can be organised in accordance with their confession and as non-denominational religion lessons. In many countries there are the requirements from the state which influence the curriculum and contradict the understanding of child development in Waldorf education. These range from the early start of schooling to various forms of premature academicised learning. Every school finds solutions, ways and compromises which preserve the spirit of Waldorf education while at the same time according with the statutory requirements. In such conflicting priorities it is*

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*important to establish a productive convergence between the possible and the ideal in order to work creatively and support the development of the child through the curriculum.*

***The relationship between teachers and pupils and the relationship with the world***

*Child development and school learning are realised in the trust-based relationship of the child with the teachers, the surrounding space and in the child's perception of the world. Waldorf teachers bear a special responsibility for the life-filled organisation of this relationship. In adolescence the relationship changes because now the focus from the perspective of the subjects is on an encounter with and involvement in the world in order to encourage the pupils to form their own judgements and to motivate empathy and independent action. Here it is crucial that the upper school teachers, alongside their suitability to teach the subject, should possess the ability to interact with the young people in such a way that the latter discover what it is that they want of themselves and develop the courage to direct their biography accordingly. Lessons are successful if they awaken further-reaching questions in the young people and the latter do not develop and display disinterest but a real interest in their fellow human beings and the world. The school finds solutions and ways to maintain a balanced relationship between the performance pressure in the preparation for exams and the requirements for a healthy mental and physical development.*

***The artistic dimension***

*It is one of the objectives of Waldorf education to combine education with life and not with the abstract accumulation of knowledge. The school has only met its educational task when in the later life of the pupil, after they have left school, humanity has been predisposed to strong thinking, feeling and volition. The way in which these abilities relate to one another determines whether the person will be able to follow their own path. Whether and how these abilities are integrated in the "I" of the human being affects the independence of the person.*

*Artistic teaching is an important instrument in this respect. Artistic teaching means a variety of things:*

- 1) Teachers themselves cultivate an art form; they should practice an art form themselves.*
- 2) They use artistic methods in their lessons (painting, drawing, recitation, music and so on).*
- 3) The lessons themselves are artistic in the sense of originality, imagery and creativity and through the structure of the chronological progression as perceived by the pupils with a living*

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*alternation of concentration and letting go between tasks. This artistic element in structuring lessons forms the essence of Waldorf education.*

*4) The teachers endeavour to create an appropriate aesthetic environment in the school and the classroom because these have an unconscious effect on the mood of the pupils.*

*In structuring lessons artistically the path is the goal because it is a living thing like art itself. In doing so, teachers endeavour to develop their own methods and avoid ready-made methods as far as possible. Here it is of relevance whether the artistic is used as a goal or for educational reasons.*

***The forms, the structure of the school and lessons***

*In conceiving Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner schools, Rudolf Steiner only gave a few identity-establishing forms which are based on the one hand in an understanding of the human being and on the other in the social task of the school. These are:*

*For the children:*

*1) Stable, performance-differentiated pupil groups. Classes arranged by age not by standardised streams.*

*2) Subject-specific streams are possible alongside.*

*3) The class teacher as companion over many years (ideally up to the age of 14 of the pupils).*

*4) Main lesson in the morning. Afterwards subject lessons.*

*5) A pre-school level without academic learning objectives.*

*6) The school as an integrated school from pre-school age to adulthood.*

*7) Individual support for pupils within the class community.*

*8) Coeducation.*

*For the teachers:*

*1) Each teacher is responsible to the full extent for the school as a whole.*

*2) An inner and outer connection is maintained through regular joint educational meetings, thereby continuing to learn.*

*3) As a rule, the school is carried by teachers and parents and is not determined from the outside.*

*4) Parents and teachers form a community which is responsible for the school.*

*5) The teachers seek and find forms of quality development.*

*6) Each teacher is responsible for their lessons on the basis of the anthroposophical understanding of the human being, to maintain professional standards, for their relationship*

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*with the pupils, their social, professional and subject competence as well as the goals of Waldorf education.*

***Entrepreneurial health***

*The establishment of a Waldorf school takes place, as a rule, with the gradual development of one class after the other. Every school initiative develops and grows. The organic development of middle school leads to the creation of an upper school. If the upper school is set up prematurely, this can place the existence of the school at risk. Development and growth thus have to be kept in equilibrium in order to enable the educational task. The size of the establishment influences the health of the school organism as well as the way in which the educational and social tasks of the school can be taken up. A healthy school organism also has an effect on the finances. Since in most countries Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner schools are not state funded, the costs of the school are covered by fees from the parents. In many countries they are therefore additionally dependent on donations. Many schools show a lot of commitment and creative solutions to preserve their financial health and continue the development of the school.*

***The school community, coexistence***

*The basis of Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner schools is formed by the school community and parents, teachers, pupils and staff getting along together as people. All their activities and work together are guided by humanity and human dignity. Everyone involved can together develop important non-hierarchical forms of collaboration. In this context transparency and clarity (instead of personal and institutional power) are aspired to in all processes of school governance as well as in the decision-making. They are the foundations for the commitment of the individual within the community and for the perception of the school in its environment.*

*Various activities and bodies facilitate the meeting between teachers and parents (parents' evenings, consultations, counselling, pupil case discussions), where the teachers in particular have to cultivate these with the greatest possible care in the spirit of universal humanity. If such aspirations can be perceived in a school, it raises its profile as an establishment which is aware of its social responsibility.*

***School governance***

*Teachers and parents are jointly responsible for the Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner school. They organise and structure it in accordance with their common intentions. In schools which have*

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*already been in existence for some decades, it is occasionally worthwhile radically to review the structures, decision-making processes and principles of governance.*

*Managing the school means always having a clear awareness of the task and mission of the Waldorf school and to continue working on it. This is only possible through the joint study of the anthroposophical foundations of this system of education. The governance of the school is therefore based in the unifying spirit of the Waldorf school which comes about when colleagues and parents work on the foundations.*

*Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner schools are self-governed (i.e. not state-administered) organisations. Teachers and parents govern the school and set up appropriate organs. On this basis, the school's organisation, finances, administration, etc. can be structured in a great variety of ways. Today it is, above all, the differentiated forms of delegation of tasks and responsibilities which, in consensus and in agreement with the mission of the school, are discussed and agreed together with the people directly involved. This form of school governance is a key feature of the Waldorf school.*

***Concluding remarks***

*In summary we can say: a school is a Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner school when a majority of the teachers lives by the spark of the spirit. It makes what is difficult easy, what is impossible possible and illuminates the dark.*

Within the Pedagogical Section there is a board responsible for recognizing schools as Waldorf schools. The right to use the trademark is only granted after this recognition. This task may be delegated to national organizations. The schools that have been granted this recognition are included in an international list of schools published by the Hague Circle.

The Waldorf Federation in Romania is a non-profit organization, comprising 23 associations and representing at level and international level the interests of all schools and kindergartens as well as center of curative pedagogy in Romania. It supervises and ensures the quality of Waldorf education in Romania by organizing monitoring audits in every unit as well as by coordinating the training of all staff involved in the alternative, be it for beginning teachers or for teachers who need longlife training. Finally the Federation is the body that assigns the professional credits necessary in order to get the recognition as a Waldorf teacher.

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As a result of the document adopted in Dornach the Waldorf Federation of Romania has adopted a set of criteria to be met by schools and kindergartens in Romania in order to be granted the right to bear the trademark “Waldorf”. They are as follows:

*The Advisory Council of the Waldorf Federation in Romania has identified the following elements that constitute the specific features of Waldorf pedagogy in Romania:*

- *Teaching in epochs (modules) in grades 0–XII;*
- *Teaching two foreign languages in grades I–XII;*
- *Ensuring a unified school structure (continuity from grades 0–XII);*
- *A school system without textbooks;*
- *A balanced weighting of cognitive, artistic, and practical subjects in the curriculum;*
- *Specific Waldorf celebrations (end-of-epoch celebrations and events dedicated to the year's calendar);*
- *A specific structure of the main lesson (recitation, rhythmic part, teaching-learning-assessment part, narrative part);*
- *Seasonal tables;*
- *Creating a specific classroom and school environment;*
- *Building a school community (parents-students-teachers);*
- *The existence of specific documents for the alternative education system — in development;*
- *Collegial leadership of educational institutions;*
- *Weekly faculty meetings;*
- *An emphasized role for the class teacher through accompanying the same class for 6–7 years ("mosaic" teaching staff) — a goal to strive for;*
- *Artistic teaching;*
- *Regular participation of teachers in internal and external professional development programs;*
- *Specific educational subjects*

The elements listed above, which define the specific features of Waldorf pedagogy in Romania, have, of course, been aligned with the document adopted in Dornach but have also taken into account the realities of the Romanian education system, especially since the majority of Waldorf schools in Romania are public schools.

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Waldorf pedagogy promotes humanistic values, emphasizing that students must develop their individual skills to ultimately form free and independent judgment. Therefore:

- The education process focuses on the whole person, intertwining the artistic with the scientific and harmonizing them within the educational process.
- School subjects are not viewed as an end in themselves but as educational tools.
- At the end of each module and school year, students receive written evaluations from their teacher and other educators. These evaluations synthesize their progress and challenges in each subject during the respective module or school year.
- The use of textbooks as the sole source of information is avoided, and sometimes textbooks are completely abandoned in favor of cultivating in students the habit of consulting diverse sources of information.
- Subjects such as the native language, mathematics, history, geography, biology, physics, and chemistry are taught in modules lasting 3-4 weeks, with two hours per day, usually at the start of the school day. Foreign languages, physical education, music education, artistic education, and practice sessions for the native language and mathematics are scheduled in a regular rhythm.
- Subjects and activities specific to Waldorf pedagogy include: two modern foreign languages starting in the first grade, eurythmy, learning a musical instrument (block flute) starting in the first grade, form drawing, monthly celebrations at the end of a module, and workshops for technological applications involving work with wood, clay, iron, copper, textiles, etc.
- A unique curriculum, approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture (M.E.C.), is implemented at all educational levels.
- The traditional hierarchical leadership system in schools is replaced with collegial leadership.

Each of the criteria that define the specific features of Waldorf pedagogy can be expanded upon and supported with concrete examples. However, in this work, we will focus on just two of them: the collegial leadership of the school and the weekly faculty council.

In the address given on the preliminary evening of the teacher and educator training course during the founding of the Free Waldorf School in Stuttgart in September 1919, Rudolf Steiner stated:

*"The Waldorf School must be a true cultural phenomenon to achieve a renewal of our contemporary spiritual life. A change must be considered in all aspects; the entire social*

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*movement ultimately stems from spiritual aspects, and the school issue is a subcomponent of the major burning spiritual issues of the present. The potential of the Waldorf School must be utilized in this case to act as a reformer, revolutionizing the field of education.*" (Rudolf Steiner, 1998, p. 13)

What Steiner said at the beginning of the 20th century remains highly relevant today, and a school can only be an act of culture through the contribution of its teachers. The Waldorf school is a unified school in the sense that it considers only the goal of educating and forming the whole human being. Therefore, Waldorf teachers have the duty to embody what is most beautiful, moral, and dignified in themselves, serving as role models for young people. They must never forget that at every moment, they act as an example in educating the younger generation.

In Waldorf schools, it is crucial to accept that the school demands not only expertise in a specific field but also the capacity to be an empathetic being tasked with educating through all possible means. Thus, in addition to being a skilled specialist, a Waldorf teacher is also deeply knowledgeable about the human being as presented in general anthropology, which forms the foundation of Waldorf pedagogy. Rudolf Steiner urged the teaching staff to base their pedagogical and organizational principles on the collective discussion of all school matters, particularly pedagogical ones, within the faculty council. For this reason, he stated, the school must be organized administratively and run in a republican manner. In a genuine "teacher's republic," there should be no imposed directives; instead, teachers must carry within themselves the full responsibility for their actions. Each individual must take complete responsibility for their role independently.

Thus, the most significant role in the administration of a Waldorf school lies with the Faculty Council, which meets weekly on Thursdays and follows a very structured agenda. At the start of the meeting, a rhythmic section is conducted to catalyze energies and bring the teachers together in a focused and unified state for the discussions to follow. Next is the pedagogical segment, where fundamental works of Waldorf pedagogy are studied. This is followed by an applied section, in which the specific needs of each school age, class, and individual students requiring special attention are discussed collectively by the teachers. The final part of the meeting is dedicated to administrative matters, which are deliberated and decided upon together.

As a result, the Faculty Council meetings are not merely informational sessions where the principal assigns tasks; they are primarily a professional development activity. Every teacher

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present engages with the school's pedagogical and administrative challenges, feeling actively involved in the cultural act that is the Waldorf school. Teachers feel free to express their opinions, knowing they are valued, and experience a sense of belonging to the group. This fosters an appreciation for their teaching work and a feeling that their efforts are recognized and meaningful.

In the Faculty Council, general pedagogical topics are discussed regardless of specialty, with participation from all teachers and educators, as every "family member" is interested in the journey of the others. However, the image of the child remains the central focus of concern for every topic, even those that are administrative in nature.

In Romanian state-run Waldorf schools, the principal is elected from among the Faculty Council members and designated to participate in the appointment process. The principal fulfills all legal requirements, carries out the specific duties of the role, and meets the associated obligations. Within the school, the principal is primarily seen as a representative of the school who upholds its unique character while harmonizing relationships with higher hierarchical institutions or partners. However, this role should not be confused with the typical functions of a principal, as they do not hold supreme decision-making powers, cannot make decisions unilaterally, and do not bear all responsibilities alone. These are distributed among various teachers and educators. Sharing responsibility among multiple individuals leads to increased involvement within the "family."

At the school level, there is also the Administrative Council, which works closely with the principal. This council is established in accordance with the law and includes teachers with pedagogical experience in the school's development, who voluntarily take responsibility for the school's future as part of their own professional trajectory.

Within Waldorf groups, there is a strong sense of job satisfaction and a shared desire to achieve objectives with high quality to serve the common ideal—holistic education of the human being. A sense of community, belonging, and "we" predominates, fostering group unity. This strong group cohesion makes it easier to overcome any difficulties, with the support of the collective. Without outright rejecting traditional education but rather aiming to adopt what is valuable from it, Waldorf Schools in Romania seek to offer parents and children an alternative—educational pluralism.

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